

Literature, &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

THE OLD MILL.

Don't you remember, Lily dear,
The Mill by the old hill-side
Where we used to go in the summer time
And watch the foamy tide;
And toss the leaves of the fragrant beach
On its breast so smooth and bright,
Where they floated away like emeralds,
In a flood of golden light?

Lily, dear!

And the miller, love with his slouchy cap,
And eyes of mildest gray,
Plodding about his dusty work,
Singing the live-long day;
And the coat that hung on the rusty nail,
With many a motley patch,
And the rude old door, with its broken sill,
And the string, and the wooden latch?

Lily, dear!

And the water-wheel, with its giant arms,
Dashing the beaded spray,
And the weeds it pulled from the sand below
And tossed in scorn away;
And the sleeper, Lily, with moss o'ergrown
Like sentinels stood in pride,
Breasting the waves, where the chinks of time
Were made in the old mill's side.

Lily, dear!

Lily the mill is torn away,
And a factory, dark and high,
Looms like a tower, and puffs its smoke
Over the clear blue sky:
And the stream is turned away above,
And the bed of the river bare,
And the beech is withered, bough and trunk,
And stands like a spectre there—

Lily, dear!

And the miller, Lily, is dead and gone!
He sleeps in the vale below:
I saw his stone in the winter time
Under a drift of snow:
But now the willow is green again,
And the wind is soft and still:
I send you a sprig to remind you, love,
Of him and the dear old mill,

Lily, dear!

From Chambers's Journal for March.

THE COURT-BALL.

THE splendid city of St. Petersburg wore an air of unusual gaiety and excitement on the morning of the 6th of December 18—. In the immediate neighbourhood of the Winter Palace, this excitement and bustle of preparation was manifest. Servants clad in the imperial livery were to be seen running to and fro in all directions; some assisting to lift into their places the most fragrant exotics, destined to decorate the sumptuous halls; others laden with some of the choicest flowers, looking gay and more beautiful because of the contrast they presented to the dead winter season out of doors; whilst to a third set of careful hands, were intrusted the transport of the large light handboxes containing the ball-dresses of her majesty's maids of honour.

All these signs of preparation for the coming festivity belonged especially to that day; for had not the Empress Alexandrine issued her invitations, commanding those so honoured as to receive them to attend her annual ball, given in celebration of his majesty the Emperor Nicholas's name-day?

Already, at daybreak, some honest prayers for his health and happiness had been offered up and some warm, heartfelt good wishes for his prosperity breathed for the twelve prisoners for political offences pardoned and liberated, in honour of that occasion, from the fortress; but indeed, though doubtless their emotions might surpass in enthusiasm and intensity those of the mass of the people, still there was pretty generally spread in those days a very warm and loyal-hearted feeling of personal attachment to the czar, which of course, signalled itself on this his saint's day.

At noon, Nicholas reviewed his noble regiment of the Chevalier Guards in the Champ de Mars, taking occasion to compliment, with a few well-chosen words, his most efficient officers, on whom also he bestowed more tangible marks of his favour, by presenting them with medals of gold, bearing his likeness. From thence he drove to the ice-mountain, where the young cadets were amusing themselves after partaking of a splendid collation, provided for them by their imperial master. Ay, and right royal and noble did he look as he leaped from his sledge on arriving on the ground; and right glad and welcome rose the cheer from 200 young voices, clear and shrill in the frosty air, greeting his presence among them.

Thus passed the hours of the fete day. At ten o'clock at night, the windows of the Winter Palace presented one blaze of light; and the string of carriages drawn up to deposit the guests at the great doors, betokened that the crowning festivities of the day were about to begin. By eleven o'clock, the emperor and empress had entered the ball-room, and walked through the first *Polonaise*, when two very elegantly dressed ladies passed through the crowds of decorated uniforms that obstructed their

progress, and made their way up to the far end of the magnificent saloons, to the dais occupied by the empress. As they will play rather an important part in this little narrative, I will describe their position in life and their personal appearance.

Although of Polish extraction, the elder of the two sisters—for such was their relationship—possessed the style of beauty most admired in Russia. She might have been about twenty-five years of age, and was fair, fresh complexioned, and of middling stature; well formed, but with that full figure which gives promise in after life of embonpoint. Dressed with extreme taste, and blazing with jewels, she attracted many eyes as she passed through the room. Six or seven years earlier, she had married the Prince Gagarine, a noble well known to stand high in favour at Court, but supposed to be so exclusively occupied with his military duties as to have but small sympathy with the wife so many years younger than himself. They had no children, and the interests and amusements of the Princess Gagarine centered in the world of gaiety, where she filled a prominent place, and of which she was esteemed a most distinguished ornament.

On the evening in question, her look and whole manner denoted some especial cause of pride and pleasure, and it arose from the very legitimate circumstance that it was the first occasion of her sister's appearance in the highest society of the capital; and I call this pride and pleasure legitimate, for she filled in some degree the place of a mother to the young girl who accompanied her.

It may seem strange that this evening should have been the first introduction of that sister to the court, but it was the consequence of a train of circumstances somewhat unusual. Owing to the feeble health of their mother, she had been brought up in great retirement; and it was only on the death of this lady, some time before, that the duty of finishing her education, and presenting her to the world, had devolved on the princess. For this reason, a mixed feeling of curiosity and admiration pervaded the courtly crowd, who turned to gaze on the fair young companion the princess led so triumphantly to the foot of the throne.

Natalie Polensky was barely seventeen, and presented a great but charming contrast to her elder sister. Tall, slight, with masses of the darkest hair, glossy and beautiful, folded simply round her head in thick braids, with a more lofty, refined, spiritual style of beauty in her features, and a more sweet and earnest expression in her dark eyes, well might she excite the envy of some, and gratify the admiration of others of the gazers who turned so inquiringly towards her; and, above all, well might she justify the conscious air of undisguised pleasure with which the princess presented her to her imperial mistress. As to Natalie, her manner, shy, and yet dignified, expressed in graceful contrast the gratification so young a girl must have felt in so splendid a scene, and somewhat of bewilderment at the crowd and confusion around her.

As they retired from making their obeisance to their imperial hosts, the kind eyes of the empress followed them with some interest; and she smiled slightly to see how many aspirants pressed forward to solicit the hand of Natalie for the dance about to begin. But ere she could make a selection, the Grand-duke Alexander, the present emperor of All the Russias, passed through the crowd, and led her out from the midst of the many competitors for the first waltz. Nor were Natalie's triumphs destined to end here; the emperor himself congratulated the princess on her sister's rare attractions; and the empress hinted that, on the first occasion, she would decorate her with the *chiffre*, and appoint her maid of honour.

Never had a ball seemed so delightful, and never did the princess return to her home more gratified than she did on that memorable night; and, indeed, it was but the commencement of a series of conquests; and this might account for the fair Natalie refusing many brilliant and unexceptionable offers of marriage. Possibly, young as she was, she shrunk from surrendering her liberty so soon—possibly she nursed some of greater love and more faithful devotion than these courtly suitors seemed likely to bestow upon her. Her sister left her undisturbed, and made no remonstrances on account of those many rejections; perhaps she did not wish so soon to relinquish the pleasure of her society, or the share of popularity that Natalie's success reflected upon herself. In the meantime, as had been expected, the younger sister was created maid of honour to her majesty; and the first separation between them occurred when she went with the court to spend the summer season quietly at Peterhof, in the happy domestic circle of her imperial mistress.

There, the attraction the empress had felt towards her from the very first ripened into warm interest; for during the many hours of quiet life, rendered imperative by her feeble health, Natalie's beautiful voice and musical talents contributed much to cheer and soothe her; and in the humbler occupation of reading aloud, the maid of honour spent many hours of most pleasurable retirement with the family of one she learned to love as a friend, while revered and honoured her as a mistress.

So passed the brief bright summer-days at

Peterhof. In the meantime, people began to wonder why the heir-apparent of the throne did not marry. His father more than once spoke to him seriously on the duty that lay before him, and questioned him respecting his feelings towards the various German princesses whose families alone could be honoured by his choice. The grand-duke answered lightly enough, that there was plenty of time before him; and with a significant shrug of the shoulders, that made even his father's face relax into a smile, dismissed the topic.

By and by, the Empress also addressed her son on the same subject, telling him openly how anxious she felt about it. He answered as he had done his father; but it is not so easy to deceive a mother's eye; she well knew this assumed indifference veiled some deeper feeling in her son's heart. She determined to watch him narrowly. Judge, then, of the mingled consternation and pain with which she became convinced her favourite Natalie was the object of his affections, and when she could not but believe that the feeling was warmly reciprocated.

The Princess Gagarine was immediately commanded to a private interview; wherein, to her extreme surprise, the empress, with heightened colour and nervous trembling of the voice, accosted her by demanding abruptly what she knew about her sister's audacious attachment. The princess, of course, denied all knowledge, all suspicion of the fact imputed, and endeavoured to reassure the empress by declaring that she must be mistaken; but when she was dismissed, and could question Natalie in private, she found that such was by no means the case. In vain did she argue with her that it was impossible the grand-duke should really love her; in vain represent to her that he only assumed the appearance of affection to amuse himself at her expense; and urged upon her, by every consideration of pride, of self-respect and womanly feeling to rouse herself from so dangerous, so fatal a delusion. To all this Natalie only made reply by confessing the most entire faith in her lovers' protestations. After a prolonged and painful discussion, the princess sought her husband's advice on the matter. He took it up most seriously, and threw himself upon his sister-in-law's compassion, imploring her, for all their sakes, to combat and control her unfortunate passion; adding, 'If once it reach the ears of his majesty, we are all ruined.'

Next day the princess besought an interview with her majesty, which was immediately granted; and throwing herself at the empress's feet, she implored her to pardon what she called her guilty negligence not having foreseen such a possibility, warned her husband's perfect innocence in other respects. 'Command us, madame, and how gladly and implicitly shall you be obeyed! I will watch over my unfortunate sister night and day: never shall they meet again; never shall any message or correspondence pass between them; only, I entreat your majesty, keep what has transpired a secret from the emperor, or we are lost.'

The empress, mollified by her candour and submission, promised to think over it, and seen her again. Three days from that time, the two sisters were on their way to Italy, as the rumour ran, to cultivate to the utmost the great musical talent of the younger lady, which had so recommended her to her imperial mistress's favour. In itself, this would have excited no surprise; but the downcast looks, ill-health, and evident depression of spirits under which the grand-duke laboured, gave rise to many whispered hints, that took form and shape gradually—and which did not escape the eagle observation of the czar; therefore it was with more authority of manner than in his first discussion with his son, that he commanded him to prepare for a tour into Germany, for the express purpose of selecting his future consort.

Three years passed away, and the short and brilliant reign of Natalie Polensky had been almost forgotten in the triumphs of later and more fortunate beauties; the Grand-duke Alexander had recovered his usual health and spirits, and even the likelihood of his approaching nuptials with the Princess Mary of Darmstadt began to be currently reported. In the meantime, Natalie had gradually faded away like a flower transplanted to some uncongenial soil, and with the heat of the noontide sun pouring down unsheltered upon its head. She had altered day by day, wasting and fretting away to a pale delicate spiritless girl. Her medical men pronounced her illness to be a decline; there seemed not so much of actual disease, as utter prostration of strength, and an overwhelming lassitude and languor, from which nothing could arouse her; and they suggested that, as a last resource, re-visiting her native land might be rendered beneficial, as indeed it seemed to offer the only hope of recovery.

Then, for the first time, the Princess Gagarine ventured to forward a petition to the emperor, stating her sister's case, and soliciting most humbly permission to return to Russia. On the first presentation of the request, it was refused most peremptorily; but the empress, hearing how pale, and feeble, and altered her old favourite had become, interfered with such success, that not only were they recalled to the capital, but on the first anniversary, after their return, of the day of St. Nicholas, their names

again appeared among those honoured by an invitation to the court ball.

On that evening, let us enter the boudoir of the princess an hour or two before the time appointed for their attendance. It was the first time Natalie had ventured to appear in public; and on this occasion she lay back on her sofa propped up with pillows, so weak and exhausted that the most uninterested spectator would have dreaded for her the excitement and fatigue of such an exertion. But it is needless to say that neither of them for a moment hesitated to obey the flattering command which summoned them once more within the orbit of the court. I have said Natalie lay resting quietly on her sofa; the princess sat opposite to her, buried in thought, anxious and nervous about the fate of the evening. She did not speak to her, not dearing to ask even how she felt, and far less venturing to make the slightest allusion to past events. Indeed, by tacit consent, the one topic had never once been touched upon since they left Russia.

There was a strange contrast between the crimson velvet cushions and the white transparent face, pale and pure, with every feature sharpened and refined by her wasting and undefined illness. The large dark eyes looked larger than ever, now that they seemed to usurp more than their due proportion of the face, and the thick masses of dark hair fell loose and disarranged round her shoulders. Never had her sister seen her look so touchingly beautiful.

Her dress for the evening, of white lace, lay on a chair near her, and with it wreath of lilies of the valley, one of the commonest of Russian wild flowers, which she had selected to wear. She lay back abstracted, turning round and round her thin finger a simple little enamelled ring she had worn night and day for the last three years—a ring she most jealously refused to take off, and which, she confessed, had words engraved inside it which none but herself and the giver knew of; but who that giver was, or what the motto, the princess never could ascertain. So they stayed till the last moment, Natalie murmuring to herself the refrain of a little German song, an especial favourite of the empress's—an adieu, full of unshed tears. At last, the Prince Gagarine entering, with some remark on the lateness of the hour, broke the spell of sorrowful recollections, and they rose to prepare for the court-ball.

But under what different auspices did they again enter that splendid saloon! With what slow and faltering steps did they advance to pay their respects to their imperial hosts! The eyes of the empress turned sadly away at Natalie withdrew from the presence; but while she had stood before her, her lips had uttered only cold and common-place regrets for her illness. Beside her had stood the emperor and the grand-duke; and every shade of colour faded away while she felt what scrutinising eyes were nothing, with merciless exactness, every point of difference in her appearance since she stood there last.

The ordeal was soon over; and, pale, careworn, and neglected, she sat as an uninterested spectator, gazing on a scene in which she once would have taken a distinguished part. But as the evening wore on, she seemed to rally, and the warmth and excitement brought a glow brighter than health to her cheek. She had constantly refused to dance; and it was not until quite late in the evening that she consented to stand up and take part in a quadrille. Her partner was one of her old admirers, who still loved her with the same warmth he had expressed years before.

I have said she had already met face to face the heir apparent of the throne. Then, not the sharpest observation could have detected beyond her extreme pallor, any sign of emotion or embarrassment. The grand-duke had behaved with the most princely courtesy, and she, on her side, with reserve and respect. But who shall describe her confusion when Alexander took his place opposite her in the dance? It was too late to retreat—all eyes were fixed upon them—and, above all predominant, she knew the emperor's gaze was concentrated on them alone.

In the figure where their hands met for a moment, to the astonishment of everybody, the grand-duke retained Natalie's hand so long in his grasp, that she lost all self-possession; the room seemed to swim round her, the music to become an indistinct murmur; the coldness of death crept over her limbs, and she was on the point of falling, when the emperor stepped forward and, without saying a word, drew her arm within his, carried rather than led her out of the room; and while some hastened to order round her carriage, to facilitate her departure, he wrapped her in her turreted mantle, and, after seeing her safe in her sister's care, returned to the ball-room without changing a muscle of his face.

What a world of emotion and struggle there may be in the heart at the very time when we seem most placidly occupied with simply external things! The quadrille was not over when the emperor returned to the room; but those who knew what grave interests were concerned in this little scene, that took not half the time to enact it has taken to describe, were not deceived by the expression of his marble face.

Early next morning, to the surprise of the whole household at Natalie's home, the emperor was announced, desiring to speak with her